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IVORY COAST: 1986 AND BEYOND

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Analyst: Robert Handloff

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IVORY COAST: 1986 AND BEYOND

KEY JUDGMENTS

The stable, pro-Western Government of Ivory Coast, under its octogenarian President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, faces uncertainty as it prepares for a successor. The two most plausible candidates are Philippe Yace and Henri Konan Bedie, with the latter the more likely to succeed. The successor government will be challenged by demands for greater equity in the distribution of resources, more rapid "Ivorianization" in the private sector, and potentially hostile relationships with radical, neighboring military regimes.

Because the Ivorian ruling elite has an unqualified interest in maintaining the status quo, sharp departures from current policy are highly unlikely. At the same time, neither Bedie nor Yace has the political expertise, charismatic appeal, or mythical stature of Houphouet-Boigny, and so they will be obligated to make at least token concessions to those demanding an economic reordering. Consequently, the government will continue to press the Levantine community for greater Ivorian participation, especially in high-visibility positions, and for greater local investment. The French private sector will face similar demands for Ivorianization and similar limits on repatriation of profits. In addition, the Ivorian Government may seek ways to make French military support and assistance less conspicuous; however, Houphouet-Boigny's successor will continue to rely on French military support and the presence of the 43rd Marine Infantry Battalion in particular to deter domestic political unrest.

Internally, the government will continue its highly successful strategy of coopting--or if necessary, repressing--potential opponents among the military, students, intellectuals, and radical labor. By continuing to provide aid to some of its neighbors as well as employment for large numbers of Burkinabe, Malians, Ghanaians, and Guineans, the government will also effectively neutralize possible subversion from the surrounding military regimes.

In effect, Ivory Coast's own armed forces will also be neutralized. By keeping military salaries and perquisites attractive, and by naming current and former officers to positions of responsibility in the party, Houphouet-Boigny's successor will continue the process of integrating civilian and military elites. Rather than resorting to direct action, the armed forces will express its will through the political establishment.

IVORY COAST: 1986 AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

Ivory Coast is a West African country about the size of New Mexico, with a population of approximately 10 million. While nominally a democracy with a president and legislature sharing power, the Government of Ivory Coast in fact has been the government of virtually one man: President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, affectionately called le vieux, the old man. He has ruled the country since independence in 1960 and has dominated Ivorian politics since the stirrings of independence in the late 1940s. Under his conservative tutelage, Ivory Coast has retained strong ties to France and has been an equally strong proponent of Western interests on the African continent and in international organizations.

Houphouet-Boigny, who in November 1985 won reelection to a fifth term, has not indicated any preference for a successor; consequently, there is considerable uncertainty surrounding succession. No candidate enjoys the stature of the president, and none--with the possible exception of Philippe Yace--has had the experience or preparation thought necessary for assuming office.

CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

Though it calls itself a one-party democracy, Ivory Coast is not a political democracy in the Western sense. There is no institutionalized opposition, although nowadays parliamentary elections are contested in most cases. Civil liberties, which never flourished under the French, are still limited. While Ivory Coast appears to be a country of laws, those laws have been tailored to suit a specific set of governors and, as has been repeatedly demonstrated over the years with the succession question, can easily be altered at their discretion.

The current party-state most resembles a political machine. Executive power resides in the office of President Houphouet-Boigny, whose rule has been that of a benign autocrat. He is head of government, head of state, head of the party, and commander in chief of the armed forces. In his role as head of government, Houphouet-Boigny appoints his cabinet, names the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and selects the heads of all extragovernmental commissions and councils. As head of state, he proposes and conducts Ivorian foreign policy. As head of the party, he sets policy directions and appoints members to all policymaking boards. Although there have been occasions when popular sentiment as expressed through party organs or the National Assembly has forced the President to alter a policy decision, he is without question the country's dominant political force.

Providing the pretense--and at times the substance--of a representative democracy is the National Assembly, recently enlarged from 147 to 175 members.

Historically, the National Assembly has been a passive body that almost automatically consented to executive instructions. Constitutional changes promulgated in October 1985 eliminated the post of vice president and provided for the appointment of the president of the National Assembly as interim president of the republic should the post become vacant for whatever reason. Thus, membership in and the activities of the Assembly have taken on greater importance. Deputies to the Assembly are elected by universal suffrage for 5-year terms. Until 1980, single candidate elections were the rule for all deputies; that is no longer true.

Political activity in Ivory Coast is restricted to a single party, the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI), to which all citizens of the state must belong. Local participation in national policy decisions theoretically is provided by the 208-member Committee Directorate, a nationwide body elected by delegates from each political district. At this policymaking level, the party is a broadly based coalition of interests under tight presidential control.

The most powerful organ within the party is the 58-member Political Bureau, which is responsible for major policy decisions affecting the party-state. The Political Bureau includes all cabinet officers, plus representatives of the political, military, and business elite who share responsibilities for various aspects of party government such as finances, legal affairs, propaganda, and organization. The Political Bureau's most important function will be nominating a successor should the President choose not to do so, as seems to be the case.

In both the Committee Directorate and the Political Bureau, a successor will have to resolve two matters: first, a generation gap pitting old party stalwarts, such as Mathieu Ekra, Auguste Denise, Camille Alliali, and Philippe Yace, against young, ambitious technocrats in the model of Henri Konan Bedie, Jean Jacques Bechio, Balla Keita, and Dr. Alphonse Djedje Mady; second, the perceived inequities in the allocation of resources to the different regional and ethnic constituencies in Ivory Coast.

To invigorate the party as well as coopt potential sources of opposition, the President recently expanded representation on both the Committee Directorate and the Political Bureau. His successor will undoubtedly continue that trend.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE "SECOND REPUBLIC"

The problems confronting Houphouet-Boigny's successor will be considerable and will focus on a more equitable distribution of resources, a more rapid pace of Ivorianization, especially in the private sector, and maintaining stable relationships with the unstable military regimes surrounding Ivory Coast.

The Economy

Although economic growth has promoted political stability, it has also fostered an unusual reorientation of political values seldom found elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Ivory Coast materialism has become an open and avowed ideology. As long as material benefits remain attainable, the polity remains content; however, such an orientation leaves the polity ill-prepared to deal with frustrations at times of belt tightening.

Currently, Ivory Coast is emerging from its most severe economic crisis since independence. The GDP grew by approximately 5 percent in 1985 after falling by about 10 percent during the previous 3 years. Forecasts predict further growth for 1986. As a result of natural disasters in Latin America and bountiful rains in Ivory Coast, coffee prices are rising and local coffee production has surpassed previous records. Although cocoa prices are far less favorable, the last two harvests have been very good. Perhaps most important, food production is currently outpacing population growth. On the negative side, oil production, which currently averages about 21,000 barrels per day, is slowly slipping for want of new investment. Ivory Coast still imports about one-third of its petroleum, and that figure is likely to grow as long as oil prices remain depressed and the cost of working Ivorian offshore fields remains high.

To avoid another recession such as occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government will continue to diversify its agricultural base, which it rightfully sees as Ivory Coast's principal resource. It is also improving roads and ports to facilitate the movement of foodstuffs and exports. Also in the longer term, the government will provide increased aid to the rural sector, promote the development of small and middle-sized industries and businesses with Ivorian capital and personnel, and pressure foreign businesses to "Ivorianize" both capital and labor.

Ivorian labor has demonstrated little real power. When workers have bypassed the government-controlled General Union of Ivorian Workers (UGTCI) and resorted to wildcat strikes, the government has challenged the strikers with security forces or simply dissolved the union. Because any successor will lack the charisma of Houphouet-Boigny, he could face a more truculent labor movement, at least in the short term, but, because no successor needs labor support, there is little likelihood that the administration's labor policies will change significantly except, perhaps, on the question of Ivorianization.

Equity Issues and Ethnic Tensions

During a recent press conference, Houphouet-Boigny stated that the jealousy pitting ethnic group against ethnic group in the competition for scarce resources poses the greatest danger for African society. In the past, Houphouet-Boigny has dealt with ethnic conflict by denouncing ethnocentrism as a legitimate issue, and by the time-tested strategy of coopting the leadership of competing ethnic groups by incorporating them in the party or governmental

bureaucracy. As long as his successor manipulates appointments and resources as adroitly, ethnic competition will prove manageable. Although ethnic issues will persist, they are not likely to have long-term deleterious effects.

The Levantine Community

Reportedly there are over 300,000 Lebanese and/or Syrians in Ivory Coast, many the descendants of families that have been established there for over a century. Some members of the community are Christian; most of the Muslims are Shi'a, but reject the extremism of some Lebanese or Iranian Shi'as.

The Lebanese are known for their entrepreneurial skills and have long played a leading role in certain intermediate sectors of the economy, especially commerce, where they dominate in such areas as the marketing of textiles, footwear, and petroleum, and coffee and cocoa buying. In the past, Houphouet-Boigny has ardently defended the presence of the Levantines; however, since the mid-1970s, a jump in the Levantine population, coupled with its continued domination of commerce, has increasingly made it a convenient target for protest. Houphouet himself recently issued an indirect warning against Lebanese merchants guilty of fraud and other monopolistic practices.

The successor government will continue current attempts to curtail Levantine commercial dominance by insisting on increased Ivorianization of both personnel and capital and by providing Ivorian nationals with the training, tools, and access to capital to compete. For their part, the Levantines will probably concede certain distribution networks to Ivorian nationals, but continue their profitable participation in the Ivorian economy by providing start-up capital to Ivorian entrepreneurs.

The French and Ivorianization

Popular resentment of the French presence, particularly as the technical competence of the local population has improved, has surfaced and should increase in the future. Meanwhile, the French are not without their supporters who see the French presence as inhibiting the corruption and waste so common in many Third World bureaucracies. In any case, convenience, convention, and a series of agreements and treaties have ensured the continuation and extension of French influence in Ivorian diplomatic, military, legal, commercial, monetary, political, and cultural affairs. Those ties will become even closer under Jacques Chirac, who has agreed to assume most of the cost of supporting French cooperants teaching in Ivory Coast and whose first official overseas visit since assuming office was to Ivory Coast.

Nonetheless, the successor government will partially limit French participation in the economy, first, by gradually reducing the number of French cooperants; second, by imposing hiring quotas or guidelines; third, by restricting the repatriation of profits; last, by increasing taxes and modifying the investment code to achieve greater local participation. The government will take no action to affect the French marine battalion based

just outside Abidjan. Although it has never interceded in Ivorian politics, its presence provides an implicit warning to both internal and external foes of the regime against action that might create instability and jeopardize French interests.

The French Military

Since decolonization in 1960, France, for a variety of reasons, has preserved for itself a certain exclusive influence in francophone West Africa. In 1961 it signed a mutual-defense agreement and a technical-military assistance agreement with Ivory Coast. By the terms of the two accords, France has posted some 75 military advisers to Ivory Coast and bases its 43rd Marine Infantry Battalion at Port Bouet, near Abidjan International Airport. Using its own version of a rapid deployment force (Force d'Action Rapide--FAR), France has also conducted joint training operations with Ivorian Army, Navy, and Air Force units in Ivory Coast. Finally, the French 1st Marine Infantry Paratroop Regiment, a specialized rescue and intelligence unit under direct presidential command, is also available for use in Ivory Coast and other areas of French influence.

The stated mission of the French forces is to ensure security for French nationals and fulfill French defense and assistance obligations. However, their most important task--at least from the Ivorian perspective--is to support the current government by deterring domestic political unrest.

Public criticism rarely focuses on the existing structure of Franco-Ivorian military relations, but increasingly younger officers--who will eventually become senior staff--may note an intrusive French presence, which they may seek to curtail. On the other hand, the costs of all French military advisers are borne by France, and France continues to subsidize the purchase of advanced military technology. Thus, although Ivorian military leaders may attempt to find ways to make French aid less conspicuous, the elimination of French military assistance is highly unlikely.

Military and Security Services

The Ivorian Armed Forces (Forces Armees Nationales de Cote d'Ivoire--FANCI) consist of Army, Navy, Air Force and Gendarmerie units with a total strength of approximately 14,000. Although relatively small and lightly equipped, FANCI is nonetheless sufficient for Ivory Coast's modest mission of maintaining internal security, resisting overt aggression or foreign-based subversion, and patrolling the coast. By African standards, FANCI is well trained, well officered, and adequately funded. The total Defense and Navy Ministries budget for 1986 is approximately \$US90 million--a 10 percent increase over 1985.

Unlike the military in the states surrounding Ivory Coast, the Ivorian military, and certainly the senior officer corps, sees itself as a profession separate from politics. At the same time, the military will not remain outside politics, but rather expresses its will, as it has over the past

20 years, through the civilian elite. To assure its continued cooperation, Houphouet-Boigny has made a policy decision to keep military salaries and perquisites attractive and to name current and former officers to high positions in the party, in effect assimilating the military elite. With a solid stake in the "Ivorian miracle," the senior officers have little interest in altering the status quo.

Junior officers do not necessarily see military service as an exalted duty, but rather as one of many possible career choices. And, although the recession and salary freeze in Ivory Coast have limited advancement for junior officers, they do not appear to have become radicalized, overly impatient, or undisciplined.

Foreign Policy

Houphouet-Boigny has treated foreign policy as his personal domain, to which he has brought a cautious realism and an overriding antipathy for African leftist groups. Under his successor, the direction of Ivorian foreign policy will change little, although perhaps moving from a staunchly pro-West position to a slightly more moderate one. In no other area will his departure be so noticeable because no one can match his vast experience and talented diplomacy in dealing with other heads of state.

Houphouet-Boigny's absence will have an especially noticeable impact on Ivory Coast's participation in three regional francophone organizations: The Entente Council, the Economic Community of West Africa (CEAO), and the Non-Agression and Assistance in Defense Matters Accords (ANAD), which is the military component of CEAO. On the strength of Ivory Coast's superior economic performance and Houphouet-Boigny's influence with other African leaders as well as with French politicians and defense officials, Ivory Coast has played a leading role in all three organizations. Houphouet's successor will be significantly less able to influence debate or impose his will as has Houphouet-Boigny, when, for example, in January 1986 he had Mali and Burkina Faso accept an ANAD-administered truce over one purposed by Libya. Without a strong leader with influential ties in France, the smaller Entente Council, which includes Burkina Faso, may prove particularly vulnerable to internal squabbles and sterile ideological debate.

Otherwise, the successor's most serious foreign-policy problems will arise in Ivory Coast's dealings with Ghana and Burkina Faso, both of which may be tempted to use Ivory Coast as a scapegoat for their own difficulties. If so menaced, the Ivorian Government could threaten to repatriate Burkinabe and Ghanaian workers as part of a larger effort to promote Ivorian nationalism. The clear-cut superiority of Ivorian military forces--with French backing--will preclude the possibility of armed conflict.

Opposition

Opponents of "Houphouetism" and the PDCI have had little visible impact on Ivorian politics. At the same time, the administration has felt

threatened by--and therefore responded decisively to--students and intellectuals protesting what they consider the slow pace of Ivorianization and single-party democracy. On occasion, the government has dispatched troops to the university campus and subjected protest leaders to the rigors of army life.

The preferred strategy for dealing with dissenters has been and will continue to be cooptation. The Movement of Primary and Secondary Students of Ivory Coast (MEECI), the only legitimate student organization, is a party organ, and its leaders more often than not become part of the Ivorian elite.

Laurent Gbagbo, a former university faculty member currently living in exile in Paris, represents the only articulate opposition. He heads the Ivorian Peoples Front, an opposition party calling for multiparty democracy. The party enjoys only a small following among students, intellectuals, some civil servants, and labor unions in Abidjan. It will have little impact on Ivorian politics under Houphouet-Boigny's successor.

SUCCESSION POSSIBILITIES

An explicit constitutional mechanism exists for naming a successor in case of a presidential vacancy. The Ivorian constitution states that in case the office of the presidency is vacated by death, resignation, or incapacity as attested by the Supreme Court, the functions of the President shall be exercised by the President of the National Assembly on a provisional basis. After 45 days but no longer than 60 days, elections will determine the new President.

Plausible successors to Houphouet-Boigny include Henri Konan Bedie and Philippe Yace. As President of the National Assembly, Bedie would seem to have a head start over his potential rivals. At the same time, Yace appears to have a larger following in the PDCI Political Bureau, where the ultimate decision on a candidate will be made if, as expected, there is to be a single, unanimous choice by the party.

Houphouet-Boigny himself has avoided naming or even suggesting a successor and probably will not do so, rightly believing that party loyalty would divide between himself and the future office holder, his own power would decrease, and the dauphin would become a target of political calumny. On a more subtle level, his decision to allow the political process to determine the choice reflects his belief that the Ivorian elite is sufficiently competent to pursue its interests without recklessly endangering the system.

Henri Konan Bedie

The more likely candidate to succeed Houphouet is Henri Konan Bedie. With his recent election to the presidency of the National Assembly he has taken a giant step toward that end. A well-educated, cosmopolitan technocrat, at 52 years old, he represents the second generation of Ivorian politicians.

Given current demographics--the bulk of the population is under 21--and the government's willingness to broaden participation at all levels of the political process, there is the perception that Yace, Bedie's principal political opponent, represents the passing order while Bedie, the technocrat, is for the present.

Bedie brings a new tradition to Ivorian politics, one that transcends ethnic considerations in favor of efficiency. His views correspond with those of the President, although he is believed to be a stronger proponent of Ivoirianization. Like Houphouet-Boigny, he would also take a hard-line approach with labor, students, and civil servants.

Bedie's position toward the French is ambivalent. As a student in France in the 1950s, he accused Houphouet of toadying to Gaullist control; however, he has also resisted wholesale replacement of French advisers for purely political ends. His position toward the Levantine community is less ambivalent. Although he has close ties with some members of the Lebanese elite, he will push for greater Ivorian participation in the Lebanese commercial sector and more restrictions on the repatriation of Lebanese capital.

Arguing against his nomination is the fact that, like Houphouet-Boigny, he is Baoule, thus raising the spectre of a lineage presidency. Also, his attachment to democratic principles is thought susceptible to compromise if challenged by supposedly overriding demands of modernization.

Philippe Yace

After Bedie, Philippe Yace, 66 years old, is the only other plausible candidate to replace Houphouet. He is currently mayor of the coastal town of Jacqueville and was formerly its deputy in the National Assembly. Yace was also named by Houphouet to head the Economic and Social Council, a prestigious, if only consultative, body advising the head of state on matters relating to economic development and social change. As its President, Yace can remain in the spotlight without having to endure the damaging squabbles that are all too common in the National Assembly.

His present position is not without potential shortcomings. His popularity, especially with older party militants and hacks, makes him a target for political snipers, who nearly ended his career in 1980. Perhaps more important, Yace has alienated many politicians with his personal austerity and self-confidence, which borders on arrogance.

As is often the case with a charismatic leader's successor, Yace would probably rely on heavy--even repressive--state machinery to assert control in the absence of his predecessor's legitimacy. Omniously, Yace's relationship with the military is not as close as that of his Baoule rival. On the other hand, Yace is seen as less ambivalent toward the French than is Bedie.

Although a loyal and diligent lieutenant, Yace may lack the imagination or vision for guiding the development of Ivory Coast. Given his age and

questionable health, Yace would be considered a transitional leader. A relatively short Yace term of office would probably be followed by a more-enduring Bedie administration.

ALTERNATIVE OUTCOMES

Although both Bedie and Yace are politically astute, neither is as attached to democratic values as is Houphouet-Boigny, and both might be willing to consider nondemocratic measures, such as further limitations on civil rights, that would appear to expedite modernization. If they were repressive, frustration and despair could lead new political generations to espouse radical ideologies promising immediate change. In order to secure a base, radicals could revive and strengthen ethnic loyalties; in order to hasten change, they may resort to violence.

Widespread unrest and an administration perceived as ineffectual, coupled with severe economic austerity, might precipitate military intervention. As the only political institution with a relatively untainted past, the military could be called upon temporarily to lead a populist movement promising a more equitable distribution of resources. However, given the ongoing assimilation and cooptation of senior military officers by PDCI leadership, the conditions for military intervention are remote.

It is possible, albeit unlikely, that the PDCI Political Bureau will bypass both Bedie and Yace in favor of a darkhorse candidate such as Camille Alliali, Mathieu Ekra, or the far younger Seri Gnoleba and Lamine Fadika. Camille Alliali, who has often represented the President at party and governmental functions, is one of the founders of the PDCI. He has also served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Justice. Given his age, he would be a transitional team leader in the mould of Houphouet-Boigny. Mathieu Ekra is also one of the few remaining founding members of the party. As an Aboure, an ethnic minority, he might be a suitable compromise candidate. Seri Gnoleba recently gained stature for having masterfully orchestrated the rescheduling of Ivory Coast's debt. Lamine Fadika, current Minister of Maritime Affairs and the youngest candidate, has achieved international status while participating in International Rights of the Sea conferences. As a former military officer, he may also be the preferred candidate of the Ivorian Armed Forces.

Although none of these people is as well known to the electorate as Bedie or Yace, their frequent appearances on the pages of Fraternite Matin have made them familiar, noncontroversial figures. By choosing among these candidates, the PDCI Political Bureau could avoid, at least temporarily, exacerbating the Bedie-Yace rivalry while grooming a candidate acceptable to the larger Ivorian constituency.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Succession in Ivory Coast will have little impact on US security concerns. To be sure, Ivory Coast's knee-jerk, anti-Soviet position of the past decade will be tempered, but Ivory Coast is firmly committed to the West. It will continue to support the larger US agenda in the United Nations on Chad, southern Africa, the Western Sahara, Israel, and the Middle East, although on some issues the government might side with the nonaligned bloc of African states. The government will also look favorably on US moves against Libyan Head of State Qadhafi, especially in light of reports that Libyans in Burkina Faso are recruiting and training anti-Houphouet agents. Although US Navy vessels routinely visit Abidjan, the United States does not have and has not sought basing privileges. Given the primacy of French interests, that situation is not likely to change. Ivory Coast will also allow France to maintain its marine battalion at Port Bouet to protect France's African interests, ensure against Burkinabe or Ghanaian sabre-rattling, and support the current government.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the demise of Houphouet-Boigny, there will be the political maneuvering and skirmishing which are inevitable when inflated egos contemplate the division of spoils. However, the consensus on economic and political policy will hold and the outlook will remain positive under a Yace or the more likely Bedie administration. The stabilizing effects of economic growth that have allowed the government to coopt political dissidents will persist. The current economic upturn will also alleviate pressures for more rapid Ivorianization from students and others whose successful entry into the economy had been problematic.

With a sounder economy, the political elite will find it in their interests to maintain stability while strengthening existing political institutions. Internal political opposition, while not negligible, will remain thwarted or, in the time-tested tactic of Houphouetism, be coopted into the system. The military will not remain outside politics, but rather express its will, as it has over the past 2 decades, through the civilian elite. Labor, much of which is non-Ivorian, will remain passive either out of fear of forced repatriation or satisfaction with wages and working conditions as compared with other West African labor markets. The French and Lebanese will still find significant investment opportunities for their capital, if not job opportunities for their nationals. Finally, ethnic conflict will simmer beneath the surface of Ivorian politics, stimulating development in some instances, interfering in others. However, as long as the government provides legitimate, if informal, channels for the articulation of grievances, and pressures are regularly vented, it is unlikely that Ivorian political culture will undergo cataclysmic change, or, concomitantly, that US economic or security interests will be threatened.

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